

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT APPARATUS,
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, AND
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

5 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to an apparatus and method for controlling the use of software and a medium for storing software.

10 Related Background Art

As a conventional method of limiting the use of software, software to be attached to a magazine has been limited in period (for example, 60 days).

Other methods of limiting the use of software are
15 disclosed in the operation management system and the operation management method (Japanese Patent Registration No. 2810033, USP5943650). According to the system and the method, the management control of the operation management system is limited by a battery
20 storing data for use in managing the operation, and new operation management data is provided using an FD (floppy disk) when the software becomes inoperable by the operation management data of the battery.
Therefore, in this method, an FD for the battery can be
25 illegally copied. In addition, when the FD is mailed, it takes a long time (time lag) to send the FD to the destination, thereby possibly suspending the work of

the user. Furthermore, there is the possibility that the FD can be lost or damaged.

Then, there are the following problem with the contents disclosed by the computer software rental method (Japanese Patent Publication No. 7-89305).

Problem with the use terminating process (When a host machine performs the use terminating process, the process cannot be performed when a communications appliance such as a modem, etc. becomes faulty, thereby charging a use rate for a non-use time. When a user machine performs the use terminating process, the process cannot be performed on the user machine side when a power failure occurs, thereby disabling the computation to be performed for a use time, hardly detecting illegal operations when a system date is processed when a reactivating process is performed after the power failure, etc. If they can be detected, a system date can be changed during the operation of an application although it is not an illegal operation (when the date is returned to 1999/12/30 as an urgent countermeasure against the trouble at the start in 2000, etc.)). In this case, it is not convenient if the application cannot be executed.

Therefore, it is limited to compute a use rate by controlling the use limit by the start or end of use (From To).

In the above mentioned method, since the same

rates are charged for reference only and for a large number of inputs, the rate seems to be relatively high for the reference only (the accounting process cannot be performed depending on the use level).

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

On the other hand, according to the present invention,

the battery (operation management data) can be
10 charged in real time,

there can be a smaller possibility that copies are made,

the battery (operation management data) can be automatically charged when it is running lower than a
15 predetermined level,

since the battery is sequentially used, the operation of the system date is insignificant, and even if an application abnormally terminates all of a sudden due to power failure, there occurs no confusion about
20 an accounting process, and

a payment is made in advance for the battery and there is no time lag until an accounting process is performed, so that the provider can easily manage funds and on the other hand, the user can avoid overusing the
25 battery (over budget) before he or she knows it.

To attain the above mentioned object, a storage medium according to the present invention stores

software and a management software for managing the software, and the management software has the step of restoring the software to a state in which the software can be managed.

5 To attain the above mentioned object, an information processing apparatus according to the present invention includes a storage means for storing management software for managing software, and the management software includes: means for restoring the
10 software to a state in which the software can be managed; and means for connecting to a predetermined site to allow the means for restoring the software to restore the management software to a state in which the management software can be managed.

15 To attain the above mentioned object, an information processing apparatus includes: means for restoring management software for managing software to a state in which the management can be managed; and
20 means for connecting to a predetermined site to allow the means for restoring the software to restore the management software to a state in which the management software can be managed.

 To attain the above mentioned object, an information processing apparatus includes: means for
25 restoring management software for managing software to a state in which the management can be managed; and means for connecting to a predetermined site to allow

the means for restoring the software to restore the management software to a state in which the management software can be managed.

To attain the above mentioned object, an
5 information processing apparatus includes: means for restoring management software for managing software to a state in which the management can be managed; and means for connecting to a predetermined site to allow the means for restoring the software to restore the
10 management software to a state in which the management software can be managed.

A host apparatus according to the present invention restores management software to a state in which the management software can be managed by
15 communicating with an information processing apparatus including: means for restoring the management software for managing software to a state in which the management software can be managed; and means for connecting to a predetermined site for restoring the
20 management software by the means for restoring the management software to the state in which the management software can be managed, and further includes means for transmitting information for use in restoring the management software to the state in which
25 the management software can be managed at a request from the information processing apparatus.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of the outline of the present invention;

Fig. 2 shows a data structure in a battery supply module;

Fig. 3 is a flowchart showing an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 4 is a flowchart of the battery supply module; and

Fig. 5 shows a protocol of a user machine and a host machine.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The preferred embodiments of the present invention will be described below by referring to the attached drawings.

In Fig. 1, an SBMS is software relating to a software battery management system, and a site access tool SAT charges a battery from a host machine HM in cooperation with the system on a user machine PC storing the software.

The SAT is a site access tool, and provides a user with the information about the host machine HM to be connected to using, for example, a portable storage medium CD (compact disk), an MD (minidisk), a FDD (floppy disk), or semiconductor memory, etc. Otherwise, when software is provided from the site in

the communications, the information about the host machine HM can be received together with application software through a communications medium, or only the software can be received.

5 A battery supply module BSM is incorporated into a host machine HM to provide a user-selected battery at a predetermined position by the amount specified by the user. The predetermined position is set in the user machine PC, or in the memory of the server. The host
10 machine HM and the user machine PC are connected to network or a Internet NET.

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of the present invention. In Fig. 1, a reference characters PC denote a computer of the user machine, and comprises: a
15 processing unit CPU for performing a process procedure (performed by the software of a site access tool and a software battery management system) described later and shown in Fig. 3; an input unit IN for inputting information; an output unit OUT for outputting
20 information; a storage unit MEM1 for storing the software of the site access tool executed by the processing unit CPU; a storage unit MEM2 for storing the software of a software battery management system executed by the processing unit CPU; a battery BU of
25 storage means (for example, a floppy, semiconductor memory, a hard disk, etc.) for storing data (an application ID, a battery ID, and a predetermined value

for operation of application software) for control of
the operation of the application software; a storage
unit MEM3 for storing application software; a drive
unit PDU for reading data from and writing data to a
5 removable storage unit; and a communications line unit
COM1 for connection to a network or Internet NET.

Then, a removable storage medium CD is installed,
and the data is loaded from the storage medium CD to
the computer PC. At least a setup application software
10 and the operation software for control of the valid
period of the application software are stored on the
storage medium CD and installed to the computer PC.

The operation software stored on the storage
medium CD comprises a site access tool and a battery
15 data structure list. When the operation software is
setup in the user machine from the storage medium CD,
the battery data structure list contains a
predetermined value (a value corresponding to, for
example, several hours, relating to the predetermined
20 application software as a trial process) as an initial
value, and the value of the above mentioned battery
data structure list is decreased each time the
application software to be managed by the operation
software is used in the user machine. When the value
25 decreases, a predetermined value of data transmitted
from a communications line or an external storage
medium is rewritten to the battery data structure list,

thereby allowing the application software to be reused. The operation software contains the software management system and the site access tool.

The reference characters HM denote a host machine.

5 The host machine comprises: a processing unit CPU2 for performing the process procedure (process procedure by a program of the battery supply module BSM) shown in Fig. 4; a storage unit BMEM for storing the software of the battery supply module executed by the processing
10 unit CPU2; a storage unit ALMEM for storing the application list; a storage unit BLMEM for storing a battery list; a storage unit LLMEM for storing a log report; and a communications line unit COM2 for connection to a network and Internet. When the valid
15 period of the application software is extended on the computer PC, the computer PC communicates with the host machine HM to extend the valid period by rewriting the above mentioned value.

The application software list AL, the battery list BL, and the battery supply history list BH are shown in
20 Fig. 2. Using the lists, the application software can be matched, and the battery unit price, etc. can be set for each piece of application software.

Activating Procedure

25 (1) The step is performed by the site access tool SAT of the user machine according to the address information about the information host machine HM. In

the case of Internet, it corresponds to an IP address and a URL. The user machine PC is connected to the host machine HM through a network using the site access tool SAT.

5 (2) In the step performed by the battery supply module BSM of the host machine HM, listing information about available batteries is provided. The information is displayed as a list on the screen of the display device of the user machine. The user searches for a battery
10 for a target application from the displayed list, and selects the corresponding portion on the list by clicking the mouse button, etc.

(3) In addition, by operating the site access tool SAT which receives the battery listing information, an
15 inquiry is issued to the software battery management system SBMS about whether or not each battery has already been managed, and batteries are displayed on the screen of the user machine PC with managed batteries distinguished from non-managed batteries.

20 (4) According to the information obtained from the application list AL and the battery list BL transmitted from the host machine HM, the user selects a desired battery and its amount from the displayed list by moving the cursor to select a target battery. The user
25 also can input a value using an input device without using the cursor.

(5) By operating the site access tool SAT, the user-

selected battery and its amount are transmitted to the battery supply module BSM.

(6) Based on the received battery and the amount, battery addition information is generated in the battery BU by the battery supply module BSM, and is transmitted to the site access tool SAT. The generated information is stored as a log.

(7) The battery addition information is received by the site access tool SAT, and the site access tool SAT passes the information to the software battery management system SBMS. Then, the information (the value for control of the application operating time) is written to the battery BU, and it is confirmed that the battery BU has been charged.

(8) The confirmation information is transmitted by the site access tool SAT to the battery supply module BSM.

(9) The confirmation information is recorded in addition to the above mentioned log by the battery supply module BSM.

(10) When a series of communications terminate, the site access tool SAT terminates the communications with the host machine HM.

It is obvious that, after a battery has been supplied, the value decreases each time an application is performed in the user machine PC, the operation management data of the battery BU has finally been exhausted, and the application software cannot be used.

The above mentioned processes are described below furthermore in detail by referring to the sequence flow of the host machine HM shown in Fig. 4 performed by each piece of software of the site access tool SAT, the software battery management system, and the battery supply module BSM, and the control flow of the computer PC shown in Fig. 3.

In step S3001, the process unit CPU1 is connected to the host machine HM according to the IP address or the URL. If it has been connected, then the processing unit CPU1 receives a battery list BL and a key 1 list of the storage unit BLMEM from the host machine HM in S3002. Then, in S3003, the processing unit CPU1 inquires the existence of the value of the battery BU and the remainder of the software battery management system SBMS, and recomposes the battery list BL. Then, in S3004, the battery list BL recomposed by the processing unit CPU1 is displayed on the display screen of the computer PC. Then, in S3005, the processing unit CPU1 operates the mouse and moves the cursor to select the battery BU and its amount from the battery list BL displayed on the display screen. Then, in S3006, the processing unit CPU1 determines whether or not cancellation is selected. If the process is continued, the processing unit CPU1 transmits a battery issue request and a key to the host machine HM in S3007. In the next step S2008, the processing unit

CPU1 receives the battery addition information from the host machine HM. In step S3009, the processing unit CPU1 transmits the battery addition information to the software battery management system, and charges the battery. In S3010, the processing unit CPU1 receives charging confirmation information from the software battery management system SBMS. In step S3011, the processing unit CPU1 transmits the charging confirmation information together with the key 1 to the host machine HM. In step S3012, the processing unit CPU1 receives a key 8 from the host machine HM.

In step S3013, the processing unit CPU1 combines the charging confirmation information with the keys 1 and 3 to display the result for confirmation of a user. In step S3014, the processing unit CPU1 terminates the connection with the host machine HM.

Then, the function of the battery supply module BSM is described below by referring to the sequence shown in Fig. 5 and based on Fig. 4.

In step S4001, the processing unit CPU2 waits for the connection from the user machine PC. In step S4002, the processing unit CPU2 generates a key as a session number, and transmits the battery list and the key 1 to the user machine PC. In step S4003, the processing unit CPU2 receives the amount of the battery, and the keys 1 and 2 from the user machine PC. In S4004, the processing unit CPU2 makes a time-out

check. If a time-out has not occurred, the processing unit CPU2 determined in step S4005 whether or not the correspondence between the keys 1 and 2 is correct. If yes, then the processing unit CPU2 generates the
5 battery addition information in step S4006, transmits it to the user machine PC, and stores it in the log LL of the storage unit LLMEM. In step S4007, the processing unit CPU2 receives the charging confirmation information and the key 1 from the user machine PC. In
10 step S4008, the processing unit CPU2 determines whether or not a time-out has occurred. If not, it generates the key 3 according to the charging confirmation information in step S4009, and adds it to the log. In step S4010, the processing unit CPU2 transmits the key
15 3 to the user machine PC.

Then, in step S4011, the processing unit CPU terminates the connection to the user machine PC.

By the above mentioned connection, the battery is charged, and the application is performed. By
20 performing the application, the charging process is performed again in the above mentioned process, thereby performing the application again. In the above mentioned example, the host corresponds one to one to the user machine. However, there can be a plurality of
25 hosts. In this case, it is obvious that a host is to be specified according to the information in the site access tool. Otherwise, the site information is

downloaded and specified through Internet.

In the above mentioned example, application software is stored in a terminal unit, and the operation of the application software is managed by a battery. However, the effect can also be obtained by setting application software and a battery in a server of a network, and by using them at a terminal unit. That is, application software is used through a network, the use of the application software is controlled by a battery, and the value of the battery is supplemented when the value of the battery decreases.

According to the present invention, the information for use in charging a battery is not transmitted as a file, but communications are established through a program, thereby avoiding making copies in a simple operation by, for example, copying a file,

supplied batteries can be distinguished between those already used by the user and those not used by the user, thereby not confusing the user during the operation, and

since the confirmation information about the battery charge is recorded in the log, means for guaranteeing the charge of a user machine can be provided.